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THE REPORTS ON SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDIES

The secondary-school teacher of to-day may well rejoice that his lot is cast in this last decade before the opening of the twentieth century. It is glorious to be living in a formative period and to have a part in influencing the changes that are impending. This is the happy privilege of every thoughtful teacher in the high school or academy or private preparatory school at the present time. Of course, this thought carries with it some criticism of secondary schools as they are.

Dr. Harris ventures to assert so much as this: "It has been agreed on all hands that the most defective part of the education in this country is that of secondary schools." To this I must respectfully demur. It would be difficult to find any representative body of secondary-school teachers who would so agree, and still more difficult to demonstrate such *superlative* defect. Yet it should be frankly confessed that secondary education *is* defective, —defective in organization, in methods, in equipment, and even in aims. These defects, however, are not its exclusive possession, nor its possession in larger degree than in the case of elementary education, on which it must be based, and in that of higher education, toward which it should lead. A truer view would declare that all education is as yet defective, because it is so largely empirical and tentative. The principles of the science, (or of the art; if any choose to aver that it is no science,) like those of political and social science, are still in formation. The very data for firm and accepted opinion are yet to be collected. In such a condition of things, that part of the educational field is the most hopeful upon which the attention of thoughtful men is most concentrated. Herein lies the special opportunity of the teacher of the secondary school to-day. The eye of the educational world is with unusual unanimity fixed on secondary education. In Germany, in France, in England, and more recently in America, it commands attention and interest as never before. Out of this will inevitably come an important advance, and every worker can contribute something to accelerate the movement. The iron is hot for the forging of new agencies, and even the feeblest blow, if intelligently directed, will make a definite and abiding impres-

sion. While, therefore, unwilling to agree that secondary education is more defective than other parts of the work, I cheerfully recognize its defects, and rejoice with all who find in the reports of the Committee of Ten and of the Conferences a positive promise of remedy for those deficiencies. Even more, I am ready to concur with Dr. Harris in his estimate of these reports as constituting in certain respects "the most important educational document ever published in this country."

There is one thing worth noting before we consider the reports themselves, and that is the method of the whole movement that produced them. The train of events of which this is the latest episode began with the formation of the New England Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools in 1885, unless we care to trace it still farther back to an earlier conference between Harvard professors and preparatory teachers, which undoubtedly had much to do with the creation of a demand for that association. The happy results of the association, not only in producing harmony of feeling among teachers in school and teachers in college, but also, through the specific action of the Commission of Colleges in New England on Admission Examinations, in promoting practical uniformity in college requirements, has all along been raising hopes that similar conferences of the two classes of teachers interested, on a national scale, might do for the nation what the local body was doing for New England. In Ohio results of the same kind had already been accomplished before, in 1891, an attempt was made to organize such a national conference. At the National Council, held in connection with the National Educational Association at Toronto, the Committee on Secondary Education, through President (then Principal) James H. Baker, of Colorado, proposed the calling of a convention comprising representatives from a dozen colleges and a dozen high and preparatory schools, to discuss secondary problems. The proposition met with favor, and all the more favor because of the evident value of the Round Table Conference on Higher Education at the same meeting, a conference of professors and secondary-school teachers which spent no small share of its time on secondary problems, —especially on uniformity of college requirements. The proposed convention was held at Saratoga in the following year, and led to the appointment, by the National Council, of the Commit-

tee of Ten, whose duty it should be to arrange for a conference of school and college teachers of each principal subject which enters into the programmes of secondary schools in the United States. The directors of the National Educational Association at once confirmed the appointment and appropriated \$2,500 for the expenses,—an amount that proved to be little more than half of the sum needed, so that the remainder has been raised by private contributions. President Eliot accepted the chairmanship of the committee, and all the members devoted themselves with energy to the task. Nine conferences, thus organized, brought together on December 28, 1892, ninety experienced men and women, representatives of all parts of our country and of every kind of college and secondary school. Most of them were recognized experts in their specialties. The reports which appear in the volume just sent out by the Bureau of Education are elaborate presentations of the views of these several groups after full discussion of their respective subjects for three days. These reports of the Conferences are preceded by a report of the Committee of Ten, in which there is a summary of the recommendations of the Conferences, and an attempt to coördinate these recommendations into workable programmes for the schools. In the absence of indisputable data for generalization, the best substitute is well considered opinion founded upon experience and discussion. This document brings to bear upon secondary problems exactly this kind of evidence, and is, therefore, a contribution of untold value in itself; moreover, it has demonstrated that this method of investigation—by representative conferences of experts—is capable of an efficiency of which few had previously dreamed.

In commenting upon these reports, one feels decidedly the embarrassment of his riches, and the impossibility of treating the volume exhaustively. We must, within the limits of a magazine article, content ourselves with a brief notice of salient points.

First we must note that the publication of these reports fairly launches us upon a serious and prolonged discussion of secondary education. Indeed for a year the air has been heavy with thought engendered by what has accidentally become known about the Conference discussions in advance of publication. It is evident that educational magazines and journals will teem with comments, that conventions will resound with discussions, that private con-

versation will be tinged with views, all drawing their inspiration from this source. The outcome for the time will, no doubt, be confusing; but the end will find thought crystallized in more permanent forms and practice centring more definitely upon generally approved opinions. Therefore we can be patient with crudities of utterance and narrowness of thought, even with derision and over-praise, with everything, in fact, except selfish pandering to prejudice and class-bias. Wisdom will be justified of her children, and the educational world will be far richer for this "throwing about of brains."

Perhaps the most valuable effect of the report of the Committee of Ten, as contrasted with the Conference reports, will be the direction of public attention to the determination of the real educational value of the several studies commonly employed in secondary education. Are the ancient languages, the modern languages, mathematics, natural science, physical science, and history, of the same value if pursued under practically the same conditions? Or are they of varying kinds and degrees of value, constituting a hierarchy of studies? In the latter case, who is able to organize the scheme and to demonstrate these relative values, so that common minds may appreciate the alleged distinctions and reach settled convictions about them? It is a somewhat open secret that the main report, when originally written, had as the scarlet cord running through it the idea of the practical equivalence of the principal subjects of secondary study for the purposes of general education. In the discussion which ensued upon the first reading, so much opposition to this idea was manifested that in the revision this theory received scant illustration. Enough remained, however, to suggest to one member of the Committee the need for direct protest against the idea in its entirety. I have no hesitation in saying that this question seems to me to be fundamental. Our path to the most useful courses of study, to the proper time-allotment for each subject, to the most effective methods of instruction will in the future, as in the past, be devious and shrouded with obscurity until we know whether certain subjects are undoubtedly the best for general education, or all subjects are equally good if taught and pursued in some best way, or each subject has its peculiar product, best of all for the minds adapted by nature and environment to pursue it. For my own

part, experience and observation incline me to the last named view. I have the greatest difficulty in reducing my conceptions of the value of one study and another to common terms of thought, that I may intelligently compare them. I observe a result of classical study in my own mind and in the minds of certain of my pupils, and it seems to me admirable and valuable. Upon other minds classical study, long pursued, does not seem to have secured the same result at all. Again I find scientific pursuits developing in some pupils a product that is useful and has strength. Which is better as a general education? That is extremely hard to decide, for each is good, and both are unlike. I have great confidence that the discussions and observations of the next five years, stimulated by these reports, will afford grounds for clearer views on this class of questions than common minds now entertain.

Another excellent result of these reports will be a tendency to uniformity in courses of study in secondary schools. I am not so sanguine about this as was he who predicted that within one or two years the programmes of Table IV would be adopted for all the high schools of his own (a Western) State. Conditions of secondary study are so varied and differences of opinion so positive and so fundamental that time must inevitably be a counsellor before in practice anything like uniformity can be attained. Yet we may all have the same ideal of the high school, for instance, and be content to approach that ideal as rapidly as local conditions shall permit. The existence of such an accepted ideal would act strongly on local pride to accelerate the approach to ultimate uniformity. The programmes of Table IV, being a decided advance on those in common use,—though no better than some of the best already in use,—are well fitted to serve for the present as our national ideal. Most high school teachers who have other than a local knowledge of high schools would agree that secondary education would take an immense stride forward if by some magic all our high schools should be switched off upon them for the decade to come. The academies would probably find it quite as easy to adopt them as the high schools. The private preparatory schools would hesitate, naturally, until the colleges should in some way give their sanction to the broader preparation implied in these programmes. In my judgment the colleges are likely to welcome

such a change. Harvard's tendency in this direction is well known, and the method in use at the Leland Stanford, Jr., university shows a similar trend, even more fully developed. I count it a decided advantage to secondary education of every kind, that so good a series of courses has been set clearly before us, bearing an authority born of the concentrated judgment of a hundred skilled teachers.

One result very likely to follow from the general adoption of these programmes, or from uniformity on any basis, in fact, would be a larger current of young lives from the secondary schools, particularly from the high schools, into the institutions of higher learning. For with our secondary schools organized on uniform courses would inevitably come the dovetailing of college entrance requirements into the conclusion of those courses. If, for instance, the high schools of the land were pursuing practically uniform courses, and if the colleges were too slow in accepting the graduates of such courses, the American people, I believe, would create new colleges in order to round out public education on lines continuous with those of the public institutions of lower grade. But the programmes of Table IV happily represent the culmination of the evolution of the high school courses of study and at the same time meet the wishes of modern college professors far better than the ordinary requirements for entrance to college. They seem likely, therefore, to prove a happy means of bridging over the gap between the schools and the colleges, which hosts of young people now fail to cross. Many a boy and girl of promising powers, to whom by right of ability belongs the heritage of culture, now finds this gap practically impassable, and hence is lost to learning. This need not be so. When school and college, are so adjusted that every pupil of ability may find an avenue to college lined with studies which his aptitudes enable him to pursue with success, many more high school graduates will enter college and the colleges, both in their literary and in their scientific departments, will receive very desirable accessions. To this felicitous consummation the recommendations of these reports distinctly point. The secondary schools will be the gainers, moreover, in still another respect. The conferences are agreed, it will be observed, that when subjects are properly taught there need be no differentiation of course in order to prepare pupils for college.

“Every subject which is taught at all in a secondary school should be taught in the same way and to the same extent to every pupil so long as he pursues it, no matter what the probable destination of the pupil may be, or at what point his education is to cease.” The adoption of this principle would involve the toning up of instruction in many a high school and academy, and a more rigid grading of pupils according to their ability,—both of which would cause consternation in some indulgent homes, but would constitute a veritable gain to education. In fact, all graduates of the high schools would be prepared for college. In such a case, who can doubt that many more of them than now enter would find a way, or make one, by which to avail themselves of collegiate study?

Let us pass now to some consideration—all too scant for justice—of the Conference reports. These seem to me veritable mines for secondary teachers to delve in for months to come. They abound in nuggets and even veins of rich information and even richer suggestion. The most charmingly written, (if comparisons here are not too invidious) is that on English. The fullest of help to me (for reasons purely personal) is that on history. The least in interest seems to be the report on geography. These impressions are recorded here simply as illustrations of the varied touch these pages will have on individual readers. Each teacher will find in them according as he brings to them, just as in calico printing the band of mordant-smeared print cloth in running through the vat takes out only the tint which responds to its previous impression from the engraved roller. It is noticeable, as President Eliot has pointed out, that the Conferences on the newer subjects are at more pains to indicate methods of making their subjects efficient means of culture, than the Conferences on the traditional subjects. There is not one report, however, which will not shed light on dark places in the path of many a teacher.

It is also observable, that the nine Conferences all desire that their several subjects should be taught in an elementary way earlier than they now are, “and that the Conferences on all the subjects except the languages desire to have given in the elementary schools what may be called perspective views, or broad surveys, of their respective subjects—expecting that in later years of the school course parts of these same subjects will be taken

up with more amplitude and detail." The journals that circulate chiefly among elementary schools have noticed this feature of the reports and occasionally treat it with derision. Says one, "The Committee was distinctively appointed upon 'Secondary school studies', and yet the reports in English, geography, mathematics, history, and nature study deal largely, in some cases, chiefly, with elementary school work. There seems to have been no respect paid to the limitations of the commission, but all seem to have regarded it as an occasion for imparting whatever of wisdom they possessed whether appropriate or not." What is here criticised seems to me, in the present condition of secondary education, a valuable feature of the reports. It is our custom, recently, to consider the term "secondary school" as properly applying to schools just above the grade of the common grammar schools in our city systems. This division is not in accord with all good authorities, the Century Dictionary for instance, but it is prevalent practice. The term "secondary-school *studies*," however, has a slightly different application. By this we mean studies which are pursued in the secondary school, but we do not deny these studies an appropriate place in schools that precede, or other schools that follow, in order of gradation, the secondary school. It is evident that history is a secondary-school study, even if it be pursued in the elementary school earlier and in the college and university later than the years of secondary-school life. In treating of this subject the Conference very properly discussed the earlier phases of the study, and to my view would have been justified in tracing historical study into the college, to show how the methods and organization recommended for the secondary school would benefit collegiate work in history. There is a solidarity of interest in education which would have been effectually served by so comprehensive a treatment of the theme. But there is a more important justification of the "dipping down" into elementary work in these reports. All the subjects of secondary-school study are capable of two kinds of treatment, the one elementary, the other scientific. The former is largely the assembling of isolated facts and experiences, the latter is the coördinating of these on rational lines of connection. This elementary work is necessarily precedent to the scientific stage of instruction. Now it is the scientific, and not the elementary, stage of study which properly

belongs to the secondary school. Whenever such schools are giving simply elementary training, they are beneath their privilege, whosoever be the fault. They cannot, however, be scientific in their training, unless somewhere the pupils have had the elements imparted by elementary teaching. It seems eminently proper, therefore, that the Conferences, in explaining how their subjects can best be organized and taught in the secondary-school, should point out what kind of a foundation should be laid, in order that their structure may be fair, and well proportioned, and stable. This service will, I am sure, help many a secondary-school worker to see that his work is not really of a secondary—that is, of a scientific—kind. It will lead him to aim at higher ideals or else to grade his school by accepted standards.

It is time, let me also say, to protest against narrow conceptions of the privileges of educational workers. It is *not* out of place for college presidents to criticise the methods of elementary schools. It is not out of place for grammar masters to criticise antiquated and faulty methods even if they find them in the lecture rooms of universities. Experts in English, for instance, whether in school or college, have an ample right to suggest even how elementary English should be taught. Their criticisms should be taken for what they are worth, without discount or premium because they come from any particular source, be it high or low in the gradation of schools. The fact that few of the hundred whose opinions give authority to these reports are, or recently have been, engaged in elementary instruction is no bar to these having a respectful hearing when they trace secondary-school studies back to the elementary stage of instruction.

Perhaps some sensitiveness to the criticisms of college men springs from a feeling that the new methods and the new subjects proposed for elementary education necessarily call for a new order of teachers. No one but a college trained teacher is equal to these demands, says many a teacher in the silence of her own thoughts. And there is an ill-defined fear that the changes impending will push the ordinary teachers from their places to make way for the graduates of the colleges. There is something of truth in this line of thought, but the conclusion to be reached is not jealousy of the suggestions toward improvement. The Committee of Ten squarely meet this point. "To carry out the improvements pro-

posed," say they, "more highly trained teachers will be needed than are now ordinarily to be found for the service of the elementary and secondary schools." They proceed to point out three agencies already in existence which may be much better utilized than they now are, viz.: the summer schools connected with colleges and universities, stated courses by college instructors in the immediate neighborhood of the higher institutions, to be given for several weeks during the year, and similar courses in other places to be given by the high-school master, the chief teacher of a department, or the Superintendent of Schools. To these suggestions of the Committee, one or two others might be added. University extension may be called in by teachers in places too remote from colleges for closer contact. Other summer schools also, than those sustained by colleges can, and will if the demand exists, supply expert instructors in the departments where the new methods and the new spirit should prevail. It is a wise suggestion of the Committee that the school authorities should aid materially, by paying tuition fees and travelling expenses, those teachers who undertake the ampler preparation in vacation time. Meanwhile the normal schools must continue their evolution, and discharge a larger responsibility in coming days. A new type of normal school may need to be formed, distinctly adapted to the preparation of college graduates for work in secondary schools. It is still a mooted question whether this function can best be performed by schools of pedagogy in connection with universities, where theory is likely to prevail, or by "high normal schools," independent organizations under State control, in which practice shall be a larger element. Of these agencies, we observe, some are available for those only who are not in actual service as teachers, but most of them can be used by all teachers who are willing and able to employ their leisure in professional improvement. Such teachers need have no feeling of dread concerning the future when the impending changes are fully in operation. There is even an element of promise for all such. Let us accept the assumption that better professional preparation and greater skill are necessary adjuncts to the change. In all previous educational history, expert teachers have commanded increased pay. There is little reason to think the laws of demand and supply will

cease to bring about the same result in the future. To teachers or prospective teachers who are eager to make themselves thoroughly efficient, the new demands are not a ground for jealousy or despair, but merely an inspiration to growth and fuller ability. They will even attract to our schools some who now find elementary and secondary instruction unattractive fields of effort. These demands should discourage none but the few who are too old or too indolent to adapt themselves to new conditions of school work. Even these may be fitted to do the better work required under sufficiently close supervision by experts. Vocal music is often excellently taught by teachers who themselves are indifferent singers and occasionally by those who cannot sing at all. Industrial drawing, also, can be well taught by teachers who at the outset are unconscious of any power with the pencil. The recommendations of the reports, so far as I am able to see, will work hardship to none who have any rightful claim to their positions as teachers. If they aid in removing some who are now incompetent, little harm will be done.

For the proper use of the methods recommended by the several reports the system of department teachers is evidently better than the system of grade teachers. Our better secondary schools have already come to work largely in departments, but the elementary schools have been slower to adopt this plan. It has its disadvantages, and must have its corrections, which cannot even be discussed in this paper, but under judicious supervision by good principals it is the more effective system in schools of considerable size. I confidently look for its general adoption, with some modifications, in city grammar schools within the near future; for I deem it a necessary element in the movement toward improved conditions of elementary and secondary instruction.

These reports are not without conspicuous omissions. There were but nine of the Conferences, but owing to the grouping of related subjects in most instances, the number of subjects of study actually considered, as usually counted, amounted to at least eighteen. Yet what are these among so many? By the main report we are told of a preliminary correspondence in which it came out that in forty leading secondary schools no less than forty separate subjects were pursued, and that of these as many as twenty-seven were quite generally taught. It

follows, of course, that somebody's favorite studies were bound to be neglected or ignored. In limiting the scope of the Conferences to so small a number as eighteen, the Committee of Ten necessarily ran counter to the judgment of not a few. The friends of manual training are amazed that so important a subject should be disregarded. Old-time subjects, like mental and moral philosophy, are mentioned merely by allusion. Physical training, music, and drawing are crowded to the very verge of the programme. To understand this, we must remember that the aim of the Committee was to a degree restricted. They purposed, not to crowd into a programme all things that should prove on examination to be good, but to centre attention upon the subjects they deemed most important for a general education. In their task they were compelled, even then, to pare down the allotments of the several Conferences, and at the end, indeed, they differentiated their scheme of organization so as to provide four workable school programmes, which can be carried out economically in a single school. They suggest, however, that certain other subjects can be provided for by offering options, as book-keeping and commercial arithmetic for algebra. They further say: "And if it were desired to provide more amply for subjects thought to have practical importance in trade or the useful arts, it would be easy to provide options in such subjects for some of the science contained in the third and fourth years of the 'English' programme." These suggestions open up large possibilities. Any one who has observed the course of evolution in high school programmes within a generation will recall that they have developed a marked tendency toward one or the other varieties of the elective system, that of plain electives, or of electives by groups. The development has not been so complete in the high schools as in the colleges, it is true, but it is clearly noticeable. Now to this plan of electives, the four programmes will easily lend themselves, and here we have the means of still further differentiation of courses. A manual training department or school could easily use out of the programmes of Table IV two subjects a day, and supplement them by giving shop-work and drawing to the pupil for the other half of his time. Any community could thus coördinate a mechanical department with its literary high school on a very economical basis. Similarly a commercial department, with ac-

tual practice in buying and selling, in stenography, and in type-writing could be added, and even more easily a normal department. Any who are dissatisfied with the selection of subjects for the consideration of the Conferences, can still utilize the programmes which are the fruit of so much careful thought, and add thereto whatever may be deemed best in view of local conditions.

The more we consider the question of high school and other secondary courses, and the more we try to discern the real benefit of electives in such schools, the more we are thrown back upon the problem mentioned early in this paper. Until there is some agreement as to what constitutes the standard of educational value, and as to the relative values of the studies employed in secondary education, our conclusions will lack stability and our practice will be far from uniform. To the solution of this problem secondary-school teachers ought to be devoting their most earnest thought. It is delightful that so many of the workers in fields styled higher and lower are just now interested with us in this inquiry. Let us welcome them,—college professors and presidents, grammar school teachers, school superintendents, or professional critics;—they are all our allies for the nonce; but let the men and women of the secondary schools be found to contribute their full share to the discussion and to the solution. This is their privilege; they should recognize it as their duty.

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NOTE—Articles on this subject have already appeared in the SCHOOL REVIEW as follows: Vol. I, pp. 603-618 (Dec., 1893), by President Charles W. Eliot; Vol. II, pp. 83-95 (Feb., 1894), by President J. G. Schurman; Vol. II, pp. 146-155 (March, 1894), by Principal James C. MacKenzie; Vol. II, pp. 193-199 (April, 1894), by President J. M. Taylor.